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# Research Study

*Chinese Politics  
and the Sino-Soviet-US Triangle*

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OPR 404  
SC 03846/75  
August 1975

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE  
OFFICE OF POLITICAL RESEARCH

August 1975

CHINESE POLITICS AND THE SINO-SOVIET-US  
TRIANGLE

By

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## FOREWORD

This study examines Chinese policy toward both the Soviet Union and the US in the critical period since 1968 when the current contours of the Sino-Soviet-US triangle began to emerge. It focuses on the complex and interrelated problems of how the domestic political struggle within China influenced the conduct of Chinese foreign policy and how changes in the international environment have shaped the course of Chinese domestic politics. While it is generally accepted that there is an intimate relationship between the domestic politics and foreign policy of modern nations, no study exists which systematically investigates this difficult problem with regard to Chinese politics and Chinese policy toward the two superpowers since 1968.

Part I sets forth a series of general propositions and describes an experimental conceptual framework which is based largely on the "bureaucratic politics" approach to foreign policy analysis. Part II uses this framework to reconstruct the Sino-Soviet crisis of 1969, a major turning point in Sino-Soviet relations and in the transformation of Chinese policy toward the US. Part III focuses on the relationship between foreign policy issues and the fall of Lin Biao and his supporters in 1971, another key event which cleared the way for further progress toward the normalization of Sino-US relations. Part IV discusses the prospects and implications for the US. The focus throughout is on the basic forces at work within Chinese politics which have been influential during the period of leadership by Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and which are likely to continue to shape China's domestic and foreign policies in a post-Mao era.

It should be noted that this study is experimental and its judgments are often highly interpretive and speculative. While it attempts to synthesize a considerable amount of material, some of it only recently available, the study is not intended to be a definitive history of the subject. Indeed, on the basis of the evidence now available no definitive account is possible no matter what approach to the problem is taken. It is hoped that the study will stimulate thought and discussion of the issues involved among those concerned with the subject and lead to a re-examination (using this and other research approaches) of the critical areas of disagreement which emerge.

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## PRINCIPAL JUDGMENTS

From the time that an opening to the US was first seriously considered as a policy option in Peking in 1968, this question and the related question of the proper stance toward the Soviet Union, have been bitterly divisive issues within the Chinese leadership. Indeed, a protracted, disruptive, and ultimately violent realignment of domestic political power within China was necessary before what came to be called "Mao's revolutionary line in foreign policy" could be implemented.

During this process of realignment, there were two events which marked major turning points: the Sino-Soviet border crisis of 1969 and the internal upheaval that led to the fall of Defense Minister Lin Biao and most of China's top central military leaders in September 1971. During the first of these, Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou En-lai resorted to provoking a serious crisis with the USSR primarily in order to influence the course of the struggle for power within China and the overall direction of China's foreign policy. During the second, Lin and his supporters attempted to seize power rather than accept the transformation of China's domestic and foreign policy that was underway in 1971. While the 1969 crisis did not immediately halt the march toward increased influence and power of Lin and his supporters, it did slow it to some degree, as well as provide a powerful rationale for future steps to improve Sino-US relations. And while the fall of Lin Biao did not end the power and influence of the military in Chinese politics, it did diminish it enough both to clear the way for progress in Sino-US relations and to reorder China's priorities in the key areas of military expenditures and economic modernization.

A reconsideration of these events and of the course of subsequent Chinese policy suggests the following insights into the patterns of interaction between domestic politics and foreign policy in China.

*The intensity of the struggle within China's leadership over policy toward the Soviet Union and the US reflects the fact that foreign policy issues have become intimately bound up with a number of closely related domestic policy issues; these include the central problem*

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*of the proper strategy for enhancing China's power and prestige and the closely linked problem of resource allocation. Even more basically, the contention over foreign policy mirrors a struggle for political dominance within China.*

- Lin and elements within the military opposed the opening to the US precisely because of what it implied in terms of resource allocation and what that meant in terms of their influence and power. The increased sense of security that would grow out of improved relations with the US, they reasoned quite correctly, would lead to pressures for smaller military expenditures.
- They also saw that improved Sino-US relations would lead to an expansion of the influence of their principal rival, Chou En-lai's moderate coalition, a group that both favored this line in foreign policy and stressed economic modernization rather than military strength as the most effective means of enhancing China's status and power in the world.
- Following Lin's fall, China's scarce resources were allocated away from defense expenditures and toward economic development, and Chou and his allies in the moderate coalition accelerated their march toward the strong position they now hold in Chinese politics.

*Tension in Sino-Soviet relations is in large measure a function of the intensity of the internal power struggle within Peking.*

- The March 1969 crisis, the most serious in the history of Sino-Soviet relations, was an outgrowth of the jockeying for power and related debates over foreign policy that preceded the Ninth Party Congress (April 1969).
- Immediately following Lin's abortive 1971 coup, the civilian leadership deliberately and systematically exaggerated the threat of war with the Soviet Union to create a crisis atmosphere conducive to party unity during a purge of pro-Lin military figures.
- A similar escalation of expressed Chinese fears of a Soviet attack came in conjunction with China's Tenth Party Congress in 1973, when foreign policy issues re-emerged as a central element in the internal power struggle.
- Overall, tension in Sino-Soviet relations has declined since 1969, because the extension of control by the moderate coalition has produced a somewhat more stable internal situation and because



the implementation of the moderates' foreign policy program has resulted in a lessened sense of international isolation and a decreased feeling of vulnerability to the Soviet threat.

- Nevertheless, should there be a serious future challenge to the moderate policy coalition, its leaders would be inclined to use additional provocative acts against the Soviets or an anti-Soviet propaganda campaign in order to exaggerate the external threat for domestic political purposes.

*Just as the internal power struggle has affected China's external actions and policies, so changes in the external environment have had an important impact on the course of China's internal politics.*

- The escalation of the Vietnam war undercut a trend toward flexibility in China's foreign policy that had emerged in 1964 and 1965, and thereby set the stage for the xenophobic foreign policy of the Cultural Revolution.
- Numerous events in 1968—the first indications of a possible US disengagement from Indochina, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the election of a new administration in Washington—allowed moderates in China to argue that the international situation required steps toward decreasing tension with the US.
- Chinese uncertainty about the direction of US policy in Indochina during 1970 and 1971 gave ammunition to the opponents of an opening to the US and at one point the entire thrust of this policy was called into question.
- The Nixon-Brezhnev summit meeting of 1973 and certain concomitant Soviet moves led to an intense internal debate within China and renewed pressure on the moderates to alter China's policy toward the US.

*Future changes in the external environment in general and US policy in particular are likely to have an important impact not only on Chinese foreign policy but also on the course of politics within China.*

- Any rapid or significant progress in Soviet-US relations unless counterbalanced by offsetting US moves toward Peking would lead to renewed debate within China over the wisdom of the present course in foreign and domestic policy.
- A US action such as the establishment of full diplomatic relations with Peking could paradoxically lead to a further lessening of Sino-Soviet tension since this would probably strengthen the

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moderates' hold on power, decrease their need to play up the Soviet threat, and generally decrease Chinese frustrations regarding their nation's influence and recognition in the international hierarchy.

- At the same time, full normalization of Sino-US relations would probably strengthen the moderates enough to allow them to implement pragmatic policies which could considerably expand economic and other ties with the US and non-Communist countries generally. Expanded Chinese relations with the US would by themselves sustain a certain level of tension in Sino-Soviet relations, as would the continuing competition of the two Communist powers for influence in Asia and elsewhere. To the degree that expanded ties with the US provided additional technology and greater resources which could be used to strengthen Chinese military capabilities, these developments could over time decrease the differences between the civilian moderates and some elements of the military, thus producing a more stable leadership coalition in China with a vested interest in maintaining good relations with the US.

## THE DISCUSSION

### I. INTRODUCTION: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

#### OVERVIEW

*The opportunities and risks to the US in its dealings with the USSR and China are heavily conditioned by the quality of relations between the two Communist powers. Thus the prospects for war, conciliation, or continued tension between the two is one of the most critical issues facing US foreign policy. It is at the same time one of the most complex analytical problems facing the Intelligence Community. The purpose of this introduction is to elaborate a systematic conceptual framework for interpreting the relationship between Chinese politics and Chinese policy toward the USSR and the US. The major goal is to identify the basic patterns of Chinese politics, as they impact on foreign policy, that would be likely to endure in a post-Mao, post-Chou era.*

*At the core of this framework is the observation that while all Chinese leaders are acutely conscious of the need to enhance their nation's status and power in world affairs, there has been serious and protracted dissension over the optimum cluster of domestic, economic, defense, and foreign policies to pursue in order to do so. The basic assumption is that these clusters, or policy alternatives, are supported by Chinese leaders representing bureaucratically-based policy coalitions, and that the contention for power and influence among these coalitions has shaped and is likely to continue to shape the course of Chinese politics and foreign policy.*

*This framework and the subsequent analysis in this study reflect what has come to be called the "bureaucratic politics" approach to foreign policy analysis. It views the Chinese government not as a rational monolith which makes foreign policy decisions designed solely to optimize Chinese national interests, but rather as a number of competing "players"; foreign policy is the political outcome of the interplay and infighting among these players, each of which tends to interpret the national interest in terms of its own factional interests.*

#### A. Status Sensitivity

Partly because of rational balance-of-power calculations and partly because of the sensitivity of leaders in Peking about China's status as a world power, fear of Soviet domination has long been the central issue of Chinese foreign policy and a key to the dynamics of Chinese politics generally. Chinese concern about an intolerable inconsistency between their own image of their proper role and their actual ability to influence world politics explains in good measure the decision to break the bonds of economic and military dependency on the USSR of the 1950s.\* Indeed, the final break in Sino-Soviet relations came in the early 1960s when the Soviets refused to continue their aid to China in developing its own nuclear weapons, the single most convincing symbol of great power status, and when the Soviets publicized the size

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\*There is obviously a wide gap between China's military and industrial achievements—relatively meager as compared with the USSR and the US—and the massive size of its territory and population. This disparity, and the historical, cultural, and ideological mind set which in the past made the Chinese think of themselves as the "central" or the "middle kingdom" of the world, account for China's extreme sensitivity over its "status inconsistent" position in world affairs. The concept of status inconsistency was first developed by sociologists working in the field of social stratification to explain individual and group behavior within a society. According to the classic definition by Max Weber (*Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, 1946), status goes beyond objective measures of achievement and power into such subjective areas as acceptance by key groups within society. Further, if the individual's perceptions of his own achievement and status do not correspond to the status ascribed to him by society, he is in a "status inconsistent" position. When situations occur which emphasize the gap, the individual's psychological stress can cause aggressive behavior.

In recent years, a small body of theoretical literature in "international stratification" has carried the status inconsistency theme into relations among nations. For example, Johan Galtung ("A Structural Theory of Aggression," *Journal of Peace Research*, 1964, pp. 95-119) interprets Germany's behavior before World War I in terms of the gap between its military and industrial capability and its perception of denied prestige as measured by the possession of a large overseas empire. The most comprehensive book on the subject is Michael David Wallace, *War and Rank Among Nations* (1973).

of China's debt for economic aid, an act which infuriated the Chinese because it demeaned their status and flaunted before world opinion their dependence on the Soviet Union.

Since then, most Chinese decisionmakers have remained acutely concerned about the need to reduce the power advantage held by the USSR, in order both to relieve the threat of Soviet pressure and to enhance China's authority as a world power. There has, however, been bitter contention among Chinese leaders over the optimum cluster of political, economic, defense, and foreign policies to pursue to achieve these ends.

### B. Policy Clusters and Coalitions

For analytical purposes, three alternative policy clusters can be identified, and for each of these, a policy coalition, which seeks to promote the elements of the cluster not only to influence policy but also to contend for political power. These policy clusters and coalitions, though obviously simplified for analytical purposes, are nonetheless believed to be reasonably accurate in their representation of the basic general tendencies in the complex Chinese political scene. Indeed, much of the course of Chinese politics since 1968 can be explained by reference to the struggle for power and influence among the coalitions.\*

\*There is increasing recognition among specialists in Chinese affairs that a new and systematic analytical framework is needed. On this point Professors Michel Oksenberg and Steven Goldstein argue in the March-April 1975 issue of *Problems of Communism* that the study of Chinese politics is at a "crossroads," and that "the governing models of the past . . . have been tested and found wanting." In their article, "The Chinese Political Spectrum," *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1974, Oksenberg and Goldstein present a new analytical framework which focuses on "opinion clusters" in Chinese intellectual history as they relate to the questions of how China should respond to the West and the challenge of economic modernization. In contrast to Oksenberg-Goldstein, another new approach developed by Michael Pillsbury of the RAND Corporation focuses not on ideas or issues, but rather on the patterns of Chinese power struggles ("Patterns of Chinese Power Struggles: Three Models," a paper presented at the University Seminar on Modern China, Columbia University, 1974).

The framework presented in this paper draws on elements of both of these approaches, accepting the idea that "clusters" exist, but trying to link them to the dynamics of the internal power struggle, especially at the nexus where domestic politics and foreign policy interact.

— Policy Cluster I, *the radical alternative*, is inward looking and visionary. It seeks to enhance China's status and power by creating an ideologically pure nation that would be self-reliant economically (i.e., revolutionary spirit would increase production and overcome all obstacles to development) and would gain influence on the world scene through example (and through supporting revolutionary movements elsewhere). It is inclined toward isolationist views and is vehemently anti-Soviet and anti-US. It has a strong bias against "experts" and believes in "politics in command." The primary bureaucratic base of support for this cluster is the "radical" wing of the Chinese Communist Party.

— Policy Cluster II, *the moderate alternative*, is by contrast outward looking and relatively pragmatic. It seeks to enhance China's power and status through a combination of diplomacy and economic modernization. It is less concerned with ideology and makes diplomatic calculations in terms of their consequences for the global balance of power, an approach which led it to favor an opening to the US as a counterweight to Soviet power. While it opposes reconciliation with the Soviets, it does so primarily for reasons of state-to-state rivalry rather than for ideological reasons. This cluster's modernization strategy relies heavily on the importation of Western technology, places a heavy emphasis on "experts" and reverses the radical slogan by putting economics rather than politics in command. Because of its heavy emphasis on economic development, the moderate alternative favors the relatively inexpensive military strategy of relying on an "aroused populace" rather than heavy expenditures on military technology to meet the Soviet threat; it uses the added argument that improved relations with the US would further enhance China's national security, thus diminishing the need for heavy expenditures in the area of advanced weapons technology. The primary base of support for this cluster is in the civilian bureaucracies, especially those concerned with economic affairs and foreign policy.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Figure 1. Alternatives for Enhancing China's Power and Status

— Policy Cluster III, *the military alternative*, is essentially non-ideological. Its general goal is to enhance China's position by increasing China's military capabilities, especially in the field of advanced weapons technology. It opposes the opening to the US not only because it doubts the US can be an effective counterbalance against Moscow, but also because it fears that Soviet-US "collusion," especially in the area of strategic arms limitation, could pose a serious threat to China's national security. Its advocates, therefore, reject the basic premise of the moderates that improved relations with the US enhance China's national security, and deeply resent their tendency to sacrifice expenditures on military technology in order to rechannel them toward general economic development. Supporters of the military alternative generally feel that it would be far more prudent to decrease tension with Moscow to some degree while continuing to make the development of a credible nuclear deterrent a first priority. This alternative is

advocated primarily by elements in the military establishment, especially the air force and other components heavily dependent upon advanced technology.

*The chart on page 7 summarizes the main points of the three status and power alternatives outlined above, indicates the bureaucratic base of support for each alternative, compares them with the rejected alternative of close ties with the Soviet Union, and shows how each alternative views relations with the US. It also provides an overview of the periods within recent Chinese history when each cluster has been partially dominant, dominant, or in contention for dominance.*

### C. Methodology: A "Bureaucratic Politics" Approach

The framework outlined above and the subsequent analysis in this study draw heavily on the insights of the "bureaucratic politics" approach to foreign policy analysis. In the terms used by Graham Allison in his *Essence of Decision*, it views

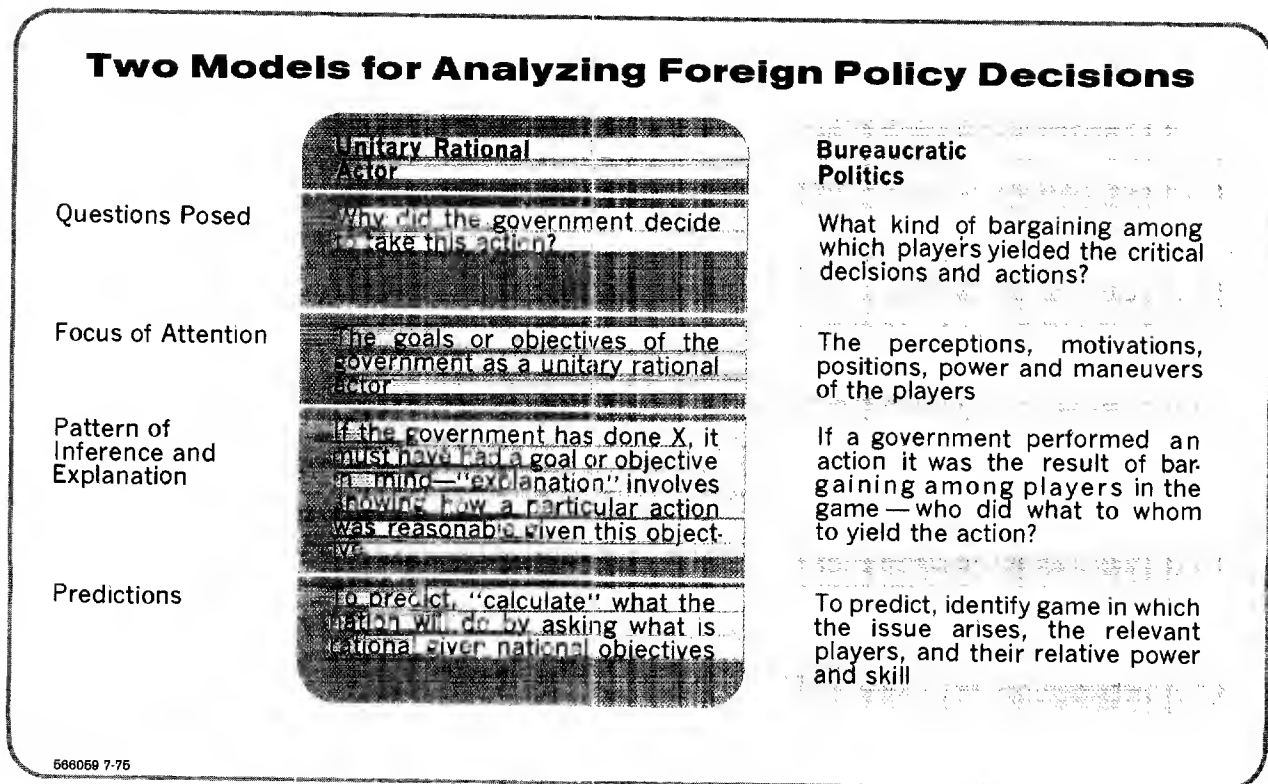


Figure 2. Two Models for Analyzing Foreign Policy

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the Chinese government not as a "unitary rational actor" that makes foreign policy decisions solely through objective calculation of the best way to optimize national interests, but rather as a number of competing "players" who contend for power and influence and use foreign policy as well as other issues during this struggle. Power is "fractionated" rather than unitary, and any given action is the outcome of the interplay and infighting among the players rather than the result of a strictly rational and non-partisan assessment of national interests. Each player becomes involved in contention over precisely what "national interests" demand, and each tends to define such interests in terms of his own individual political goals and the organization or faction he represents. Indeed, solutions to problems seldom follow from a detached and cool assessment of the alternatives; deadlines, events, and crises force players to take stands and defend them. In Allison's terms, this describes the "bureaucratic politics" model of foreign policy analysis.\* *The chart on page 9 compares the two models and shows how the different approaches pose different questions, follow different patterns of inference and explanation, and thereby tend to result in different predictions about future actions.*

In terms of research techniques, there is in fact no basic difference between working with the classical unitary actor framework and the more complicated bureaucratic politics model. In both approaches, the analyst uses the best evidence available and then attempts to reconstruct the views of the decisionmakers whose actions or policies he is trying to understand. The difference is that in one case the analyst assumes that all decisionmakers deliberate and act as one with solely the best interest of the state in mind, whereas in the other case he assumes that there exists a group of decisionmakers who are contending for power and influence and who often act against one another to enhance their own personal position even

\*Readers familiar with Allison's approach will be aware that what is described above are his "Model I" and "Model III." While elements of Model II, the Organizational Process Model, are reflected in the analysis that follows, the primary emphasis is on showing how a variation on his Model III can be used to illuminate a set of complex intelligence problems.

in some cases at the expense of what others may strongly believe are the best interests of the state. In one case, the analyst imaginatively reconstructs "China's" best interests; whereas in the other case, he attempts to reconstruct the goals, aspirations, and tactics of each of the participants in the internal debate over what China's best interests are at any given point.\*

#### D. The Players

The first requirement of the bureaucratic politics approach is to identify the key players in the political struggle and to specify which of the three policy alternatives outlined above each generally advocated. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that each policy cluster represents a general tendency, or, as the nomenclature implies, a cluster of tendencies rather than a dogmatic or clearly defined program of action. No individual Chinese leader adheres without deviation to *all* the tenets of any specific cluster, and individuals who generally support one tendency may over time come to alter their views and swing toward another alternative. With this caveat in mind, we can say that the principal leader of the moderate coalition was Premier Chou En-lai, that the radicals were represented by Chiang Ching and Yao Wen-yuan, both of whom had risen to prominence during the Cultural Revolution, and that the military coalition was headed by Defense Minister Lin Biao.\*\*

\*This process is what historian-philosopher R. G. Collingwood called the "historical imagination"; Stanley Hoffmann calls the same process "imaginative reconstruction," Thomas Schelling speaks of "vicarious problem solving," and Hans Morgenthau uses the term, "rational re-enactment." Collingwood was addressing the fundamental epistemological question of how we know what we know about social and historical reality; Hoffmann, Schelling, and Morgenthau are addressing how we know and judge the behavior of national leaders involved in the foreign policy decision-making process.

\*\*While Lin had worked closely with the radicals during the Cultural Revolution, his identification with their goals and policies appears in retrospect to have been largely opportunistic. A Chinese official interpreting this early period recently observed that Lin "had tagged along with the left wing in the late 1960s and had gone along with many of their policies," but that he was not in fact a "leader of the leftists."

During the course of contention for power and influence among these leaders, Chairman Mao Tse-tung of course played the central—and usually the dominant—role. Mao probably made many decisions in relative isolation. Nonetheless, the coalition leaders regularly sought to influence the Chairman to gain his powerful support for their initiatives. He, in turn, attempted to maintain his overall position of primacy in part by carefully assessing the relative strength of the contending coalitions and by playing off each group against the others. Nonetheless, in this process, he appears at times to have been forced—at the very least per-

suaded by concern about the constellation of forces raised against him—to reverse specific policies or positions he had previously taken.

The degree of Mao's dominance has, of course, long been a contentious issue among analysts of Chinese affairs. In terms of further developments, however, this question is likely to become increasingly less crucial given the growing evidence that Mao is now decreasing his active involvement in Chinese politics. With this in mind, the goal of the framework presented here, as well as the case studies that follow, is not to resolve the complex issue of Mao's role, but rather to illuminate to the



The "Players": Left to right, Chiang Ching, Chou En-lai, Lin Biao, Mao Tse-tung



degree possible the antecedents and character of basic forces within China which are likely to continue to shape the course of Chinese politics and foreign policy in a post-Mao era.

## II. TURNING POINT: THE 1969 CRISIS IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

### OVERVIEW

On 2 March 1969 an unusual incident occurred on the frozen Ussuri river near the desolate island which the Chinese call Chen-pao and the Soviets call Damansky. On numerous occasions since the early 1960s, there had been periodic non-shooting skirmishes in this and other areas along the disputed Sino-Soviet border. On 2 March 1969, for the first time, Chinese soldiers opened fire on a Soviet patrol, killing 7 Soviet soldiers and wounding 23. On 15 March, the Soviets retaliated with a full scale military engagement in the same area during which hundreds of troops on both sides were killed and injured. Following these conventional military exchanges, Soviet spokesmen hinted in a number of forums that a nuclear attack on China might become necessary. By August 1969, the situation had deteriorated so badly that some Western observers were convinced that war was inevitable in the near term.

Traditional explanations of this incident focus either on the territorial goals of China in initiating the crisis, or argue that Mao wanted to so embitter the Chinese people against the Soviets that they would never again be tempted to accept the Soviet "revisionist" road. The argument below presents an alternative explanation: it attempts to show that the origins of the crisis lie in the struggle within China for power and influence prior to the April Ninth Party Congress, and in changes in the external setting during 1968 which opened the way for a basic shift in Chinese foreign policy.

For some years prior to the crisis, the radical coalition had been dominant in China. During 1968, however, a number of events, including the opening of the Paris peace talks and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, gave the leaders of the moderate coalition the chance to argue for a shift in Chinese policy toward an opening to the US. In the fall of 1968, basic decisions were made to move in this direction by Mao and Chou, but these were

### Sino-Soviet Border: Chen-pao/Damansky Island

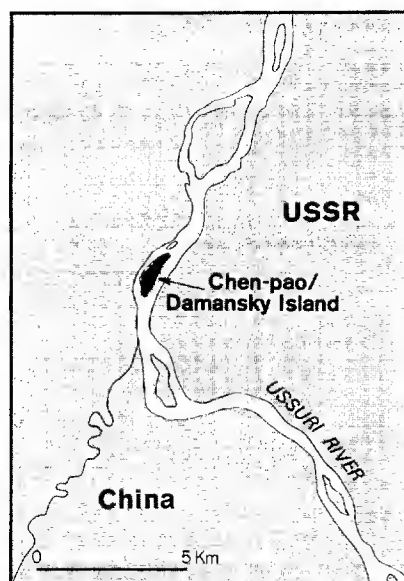


Figure 3. Chen-pao/Damansky Island

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apparently reversed in mid-February 1969 because of opposition from the radicals and elements of the military.

At least in part in order to regain the domestic political initiative, Mao and Chou decided to sharply increase tension with the Soviet Union by provoking a border clash—the critical 2 March incident at Chen-pao island. Despite continued opposition by the military and the radicals, by the end of 1969 the moderate coalition, with Mao's approval, had succeeded in using the Soviet threat to justify and implement the steps toward an opening to the US which had been prevented in February.

#### A. Traditional Explanations

While the possibility exists that the 2 March incident was an accident, the weight of the evidence suggests that, at a minimum, the Chinese ordered a change in operating procedures which led to the clash.\*

The question is, why was a decision made to embark on this high risk procedure at a time when the country was still very weak internally and isolated diplomatically? The most comprehensive

\*Prior to 1973, only the Soviets had given a detailed version of the events of 2 March. During the heightened tension in Sino-Soviet relations in 1973, however, the Chinese decided to get their own version into the record. They invited the pro-Chinese journalist Neville Maxwell to visit the border area in June, and had him briefed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) officer who was in charge of the patrol involved in the fighting. Even allowing for the self-serving nature of the Chinese story, the account adds some important new details. The most important of these is the assertion that following some February pushing incidents, a change in patrolling procedures was ordered which provided for a concealed Chinese armed patrol to parallel the regular one and come to its aid if the Soviets repeated their previous bullying tactics. This was done, and when shots were fired on 2 March 1969, the shadow patrol stepped out of its concealed position and opened fire. Whether or not one accepts the Chinese claim that the Soviets troops fired first, the fact remains that a change in procedures was ordered by the Chinese which made an armed clash far more probable, and that this must have been recognized by the Chinese authorities that ordered the change. For a full account, see Neville Maxwell, "The Chinese Account of the 1969 Fighting at Chen-pao," *China Quarterly*, October-December 1973, pp. 730-739.

intelligence study of the subject offers the following explanation:

Mao's purpose was not to attain a victory for internal use or to blacken the Soviet image internationally, but rather to assert his claim to the island. In wiping out a Soviet border guard detachment, he gambled that the Russians would not escalate either by launching a big ground-force or conventional air attack or by attacking with nuclears. He apparently hoped that the Russians would not respond at all militarily because the Chinese claim to Chen-pao was so clearcut and had been implicitly conceded in the 1964 talks.\*

Another motive, according to this interpretation, was to warn the Soviet Union that China could not be pushed around.

The only other detailed study of the 1969 clash, a RAND Memorandum by Thomas W. Robinson, offers a variety of other possible explanations. The one he appears to be most comfortable with "presumes that Mao was in full control of politics in China," and that the Chairman "hoped that permanent national hatred for the Russians would follow a serious military clash," thus immunizing China against the virus of "Soviet revisionism." \*\*

As to the first of these interpretations, the Chinese certainly had good historical claims to Chen-pao. But while this might account for why that particular location was chosen for the clash, it does not explain why China's leaders would want to concern themselves with relatively minor territorial issues at a time when they were preoccupied with the far more serious business of preparing for a party congress. Moreover, during the history of the border negotiations China's actual territorial claims have repeatedly appeared to be less important than the general goal of maintaining tension in Sino-Soviet relations. Chen-pao, a desolate, scarcely inhabitable swamp of an island totally lacking in military or economic value, would hardly seem worth asserting a territorial claim to at the risk of a Soviet retaliation of unpredictable magnitude. And

\*\*Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background Development and the March 1969 Clashes," RM-6171 (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, 1970), p. 54.

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Chen-pao/Damansky Island

if the Chinese wanted to warn the Soviets that they could not be pushed around, they certainly failed since the Soviet initiated clash of 15 March proved exactly the opposite.

As to Robinson's argument, there is little doubt that the domestic impact of the incident was a major consideration in Mao's calculations. But this explanation fails to depict the context realistically. Why, for example, should Mao time such an action in 1969 when, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the spread of Soviet revisionism was no longer a pressing issue?

In short, both explanations see Mao as making a critical decision in virtual isolation from the constraints of either domestic or international politics. In contrast, the present reconstruction of the crisis attempts to link it both to the ongoing domestic po-

litical struggle within China and to changes in the global setting which occurred in 1968 and 1969.

#### B. The Internal Setting

In the period that preceded the 1969 Sino-Soviet crisis, China had just begun to emerge from the throes of the Cultural Revolution. Both the party organizations and the governmental bureaucracy had been severely weakened by that domestic upheaval, and the military establishment had been brought in to fill the resultant power vacuum. As Minister of Defense, Lin Piao was in charge of the single most powerful bureaucracy in China, even if it was not fully under his control. After having pleased Chairman Mao by working closely with his wife Chiang Ching and other "radical" elements during the most violent phase of the Cultural Revolution, Lin in 1968 and 1969 used the army to re-

establish order and dissolve the Red Guards, a decision that must have pleased moderate elements in the army and displeased radical elements in the party. The overall effect, however, was to greatly enhance the influence and power of Lin and the military coalition.

While Premier Chou En-lai undoubtedly saw the restoration of order as a step in the right direction, he and his moderate coalition were nonetheless clearly fighting an uphill battle against their opponents. In the jockeying for power that occurred in the year or so prior to the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, Chou often took the offensive and was able to influence key decisions, but the outcome of the Congress shows that he and other moderates were in a precarious position and that Lin and his allies were expanding their influence and strength at the expense of the moderates and the radicals alike.\* The new Politburo, writes A. Doak Barnett, emerged from "a chaotic situation of violent struggle" which saw a purge of party leaders "wholly unprecedented" in the history of Communist China.\*\*

### C. Foreign Policy Differences

In terms of foreign policy, there were major differences among the three key players who were seeking to influence Mao. In the first half of 1968, Mao, Chiang Ching, and Lin Piao were all in agreement with the dominant tendency of the period, the radical alternative. Among the top elite Chou En-lai was the only major dissenter from the radical cluster and the principal advocate of the moderate alternative. While he had reluctantly accommodated himself to the isolationist tendencies of the Cultural Revolution period, he almost certainly was searching for some lever to alter the basic lines of Chinese policy.

It was not the first time Chou had found himself trying to turn the direction of policy away from the extremes of xenophobic self-reliance. In fact, in the early 1960s, he had engineered an alternative both to the over-dependence on the Soviet Union of the 1950s and to the excessive self-reliance

of the Great Leap Forward (1958-60). To a degree far greater than is generally recognized, Chou set a foreign policy course in 1963 and 1964 which foreshadowed the opening to the West of the 1970s. His policy—which was explicitly endorsed by Mao—was to compensate for the final break in Sino-Soviet relations by making an opening to "the second intermediate zone," that is, Western Europe and Japan, and to follow this with the importation of Western technology for the modernization of China's economy. He accepted the need for China to develop its own nuclear force to face the Soviet military threat, but he realized that this would have to be supplemented by diplomacy and economic modernization.\*

At the outset, Chou was remarkably successful. Relations were normalized with France, talks with West Germany were initiated, and there was progress toward normalizing relations with Japan. Chinese negotiators opened talks with West German businessmen for the purchase of a steel rolling factory, and a deal was completed with the Japanese for a vinylon plant. China exchanged journalists with West Germany and Japan, and trade offices were exchanged between Peking and Tokyo.\*\*

By late 1964, however, Chou's opening to the West began to encounter increasing difficulties, primarily because of the increase in international tension generated by escalation of the Vietnam war. Sato came to power in Japan in late 1964, and, bowing to US pressure, vetoed the sale of a second vinylon plant to China. Secretary of State Dean Rusk successfully implored the West Germans to cancel the sale of the steel rolling complex to "a country allied with North Vietnam." Negotiations

\*While Chou also loyally pursued the more "revolutionary" aspects of Chinese policy during this period as is clear from his tour through Africa (1964), his subsequent actions suggest that he was less than enthusiastic about their utility.

\*\*These early approaches to Japan and Western Europe are assessed in the following studies: CIA, "China and Japan: Breaking the Logjam," *Intelligence Memorandum*, February 1972, SECRET/NFD/NDA/BUO/CD; CIA,

\*For details, see p. 20, 24 below.

\*\**Uncertain Passage* (Brookings, 1974), pp. 204-228.

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for normalization of relations with the West Germans were broken off. Chou had come up against a stone wall.

In these circumstances, Chou's opponents were given an opportunity to challenge his position, and Mao himself probably was disillusioned to a considerable degree. Chou had tried to enhance China's strength and prestige by aligning China with the second intermediate zone against the Soviets and the US, and had failed. The moderate leaders who had advocated that position, including Chou, were weakened, and therefore in a shaky position to oppose Mao when he decided to launch the Cultural Revolution, which in its foreign policy dimension represented a return to "self-reliance" and xenophobic attacks on both the Soviet Union and the US.

#### D. Changes in the External Setting

During 1968, a number of events occurred which gave Chou an opening to resurrect elements of his pre-Cultural Revolution program. For one thing, certain Soviet actions—especially the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August and the proclamation of the Brezhnev Doctrine justifying Soviet intervention in the internal affairs of other socialist countries—offered dramatic and concrete evidence of the seriousness of the Soviet threat to China.

Just as important, several developments underscored a movement towards US-Soviet cooperation. The Chinese naturally enough interpreted this as "collusion" by the superpowers which raised the spectre of the Soviets being freed to apply pressure against China with greatly diminished concern for their Western flank. First, of course, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was signed by the US, the USSR, and other countries in late June. In early July, Moscow announced its willingness to open Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with the US. Further, the Chinese saw the US protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August as relatively mild. Most galling of all, perhaps, the US and the USSR had "colluded" in arranging for the May peace talks in Paris between the US and North Vietnam. Chou probably interpreted this movement

for possible settlement of the Southeast Asian conflict without a Chinese role as a direct and heavy cost of the self-imposed diplomatic isolation of the Cultural Revolution.\*

If the first two trends represented challenge—a third represented opportunity: signs that the US might be interested in improving relations with China. This was implicit in the fact that internal pressures were mounting for a US withdrawal from Vietnam, and that the US presidential campaign in process centered on the theme of ending the war.

In this crisis atmosphere the 12th Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress met in Peking in late October 1968. The agenda addressed questions of when to hold the Ninth Party Congress and what policies and personnel changes to ratify there. While all outstanding differences could not have been resolved at the Plenum, there is little doubt that the major issues were discussed and that the jockeying for power and position that precedes a party congress was begun in earnest.\*\*

The one major foreign policy decision that followed the Plenum represented a triumph for Chou and the moderates, made possible in large measure by the above changes in the external setting. Despite Mao's sympathies for the radicals and their policy orientation, Chou apparently convinced Mao to make a bold shift in the direction of Chinese foreign policy. Basically, Chou must have argued that the best way to shore up China's shaky international situation vis-a-vis the Soviets and to slow the pace of Soviet-US collusion was to lay the groundwork for improved relations with the United States.

Within days of the close of the Plenum on 31 October, Chinese media began to take a less harsh line in commentary on the US. When President Johnson announced a bombing halt over North Vietnam on 3 November, his speech was published

\*Robert Sutter, "Toward Sino-American Reconciliation," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1975) contains the most detailed account of this period.

\*\*Robert Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin, June-November 1961* (1973), paints a vivid picture of a similar situation in Moscow prior to and during the 23rd Party Congress of the CPSU.

in full in *People's Daily* without the usual vituperative attacks on Washington. The New China News Agency's (NCNA) comment on Richard Nixon's election was carefully worded and avoided the harsh personal denunciations that had characterized Peking's treatment of Johnson. More significantly, subsequent commentaries on Nixon's election argued that he had won precisely because of his pledges to reduce the US military presence in Asia.

With this preparation, a Central Directive was issued on 24 November over Mao's signature which contained a long section explicitly stating that it was often necessary to enter into negotiations with one's enemies. Two days later, a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement was published calling for revival of the Sino-US ambassadorial talks in Warsaw on 20 February.\* While the statement made clear that Washington should expect no major Chinese concessions during the scheduled talks, it was nonetheless apparent that Peking wanted to open a substantive dialogue, a remarkable turnabout given the vehemence with which the Chinese had denounced North Vietnam for making essentially the same decision a few months earlier. In addition to his moves to alter China's US policy, Chou also began in October and November to rebuild China's ties with a number of other countries in Asia and Eastern Europe that had been the victims of "Red Guard Diplomacy." The basic lines of the moderate policy alternative with its heavy reliance on conventional diplomacy had begun to reemerge after years of suppression.

#### E. A Radical Counteroffensive

Chou's initiative almost immediately began to encounter opposition within China. As Chinese infighting so often appears to do, this opposition took the form of articles which criticized current policy through analogy with similar situations in the past. In December, a series of articles violently

\*The first ambassadorial level talks between the US and the People's Republic of China were held in Geneva in 1954, the primary topic being problems related to the Korean war. Over time a broad range of additional bilateral issues were discussed. In 1958 the venue of these talks was shifted to Warsaw. During the 134th session in early 1968, the Chinese bitterly denounced the US and suspended the talks indefinitely.



Radical Leader Yao Wen-yuan

denounced the foreign policies of Liu Shao-chi, the former Chief of State who had been purged during the Cultural Revolution for his "bourgeois" policies. The opening shot came on 2 December in an article in the radical Shanghai paper *Wen Hui Pao*, which pointedly attacked Liu for betraying China's interests to the US during his visit to Indonesia in 1963. Significantly, the article attacked those who opposed any new condemnation of Liu's foreign policies.

Other articles, usually on subjects in the "cultural" sphere which Chiang Ching, Yao Wen-yuan and the radicals controlled, accused Liu of "capitulating" to the US and not fully exposing its "criminal acts." In a reference which had obvious immediate impact, one article stated that Liu's unwillingness to attack US policy had "amazed and startled even the bourgeois newspapers and periodicals of the West." Since Chou's muting of China's criticism of the US had generated considerable speculation in US papers over China's apparent policy shift, the article's target was obvious.



A theme of many of the articles was that Liu had incorrectly favored use of peaceful negotiations in dealing with the US rather than following the correct line of using armed force against the US and its ally, Nationalist China. "Taught by our great leader Chairman Mao," one article concluded, "the Chinese people were clear headed and refused to believe the nice words of the US imperialists . . .," an especially ironic statement since Mao had just directed that the Chinese people get used to the idea of negotiations with the "enemy," i.e., the US.

Clearly, both Chou and the new policy line endorsed by Mao were under heavy attack from the radicals who opposed any change in the foreign policy of the Cultural Revolution and therefore any softening of China's stance toward the US.

#### F. Lin Piao and the Military

While abundant evidence exists that Lin had become an opponent of the opening to the US by 1971, the problem remains of pinpointing when and why this foreign policy issue became intertwined with the power struggle between Lin and Mao, which can be dated at least back to 1969. It seems highly unlikely that any Chinese leader charged with dealing with national security issues could have ignored the dramatic and threatening events of the spring and summer of 1968, and unquestioningly reaffirmed his allegiance to the sterile radical alternative. However, Lin could have attempted to counter Chou's initiative by insisting on an offsetting step toward the Soviet Union. Indeed, it is precisely this "error" that Lin and his fellow military conspirators were to be charged with following their fall from power.

Certainly, many Chinese military leaders had long harbored a strong distrust of the US and Japan, as well as historical memories of the PLA's cooperation with the Soviet army, and it would not be surprising to find many of them gravely upset over a policy which advocated diminishing tension with the US while continuing to maintain a high level of tension with the USSR. Moreover, a plausible case could be made for reducing the immediate threat of a Soviet attack by some reconciliatory gesture toward Moscow, and then re-

allocating China's resources toward building the kind of advanced weapon's capability that would be a credible deterrent to Soviet aggression.\*

In addition to the internal logic of this reconstruction of the military view in 1968-69, there is evidence [REDACTED] as well as in the media and open statements of the time that suggests that Lin was indeed at odds with Mao and Chou over foreign policy issues during this early period.

[REDACTED] a major confrontation occurred prior to the Ninth Party Congress concerning the drafting of the foreign policy section of the scheduled Political Report.\*\* Lin, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] insisted on characterizing the international situation as an "era in which imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is advancing to worldwide victory."

[REDACTED] contrasts this line with Mao's view that while the US was a paper tiger, it was at the same time a real tiger, a "tiger of iron," and that far from advancing toward worldwide victory, socialism faced many serious problems, including "fragmentation." The dispute is said to have become so heated that Lin finally had his way only by threatening not to read the Political Report to Congress.

While couched in ideological terms, the implications of this dispute are clear if it is placed in the context of an ongoing debate over whether to begin an opening to the US or to improve relations with the Soviet Union. The conclusions to be drawn from Lin's line were that the US would be useless as a counter to the Soviet threat since it was heading toward collapse, and that the USSR would be a far more appropriate country to deal with since "world socialism" was advancing steadily toward victory. Mao's line, however, saw the US as an "iron tiger" that could be brought into play as a balance against the Soviet Union in a fragmented socialist world. Lin's "error" was corrected at the Tenth Party Congress, when, in reading the Political Report, Chou did not repeat Lin's formulation but rather stated

\*For a discussion of the problem of resource allocation and the military's view toward advanced weapons, see below, pp. 30-32.

\*\*Other aspects of the Political Report are discussed below, p. 23.

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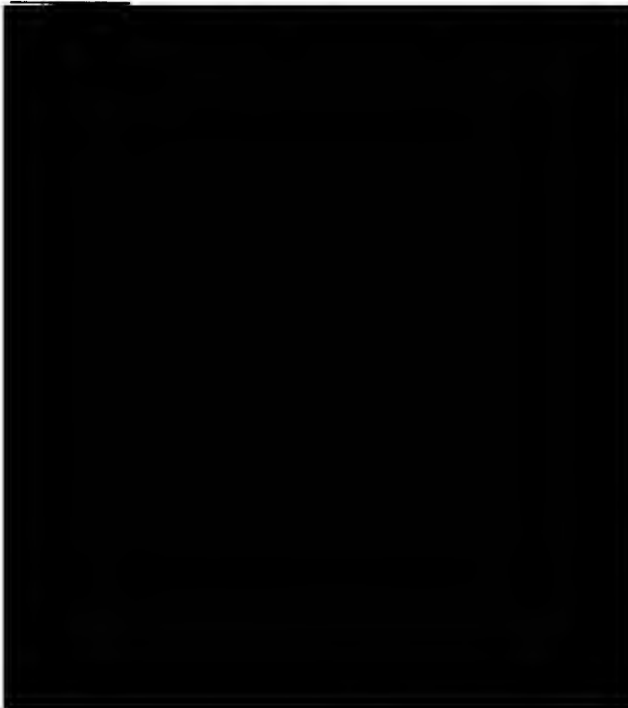
that "we are still in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution."\*

25X1X4 Other indications of a split over foreign policy at this time are less convincing [REDACTED]

25X1X4 [REDACTED] but nonetheless deserve consideration. First of all, the re-publication on 26 November 1968 of Mao's 1949 speech which justified negotiations with one's enemies could just as easily be applied to negotiations with Moscow as with Washington. And while the speech was edited prior to publication to exclude many historical anomalies, upon publication it still retained the phrase, "the world anti-imperialist front headed by the Soviet Union," a remarkable editorial oversight given the state of Sino-Soviet relations in November 1968. Commenting on the extensive justification of China's anti-Soviet policy in the major report at the Ninth Party Congress, Thomas Robinson observes "it is possible that the entire Maoist anti-Soviet policy was under attack during, and presumably before, the Congress." \*\*

Lin also had very good reasons for opposing the opening of talks with the US quite apart from the specific foreign policy implications of the move. Strictly in terms of the rivalry with Chou and his allies in the civilian bureaucracies, Lin would not

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\*\*Robinson, *op. cit.*, page 53.

have wanted Chou to garner credit for an important initiative, especially at a time when critical personnel decisions were being made regarding the composition of the Politburo to be chosen by the Ninth Party Congress. In the "violent struggle" that Doak Barnett describes as preceding the Congress, rivalries and differences over a host of matters would have motivated Lin to try to discredit and, if possible, reverse any policy associated with Chou, his most influential rival. Thus, both the military coalition and the radicals, each for their own reasons, were probably in a tacit if not overt alliance aimed at reversing the first tentative step toward the opening to the US.

### G. Cancellation of the Warsaw Talks

Despite opposition from the radicals as well as Lin and the military coalition, Chou persisted in the course he had set with Mao's approval. As late as two days prior to the scheduled talks with the US, preparations were proceeding on schedule in Warsaw. Then, as abruptly as Chinese policy had shifted toward the opening to the US, Peking announced on 18 February 1969 that the talks would not be held. Soon thereafter, the restraint that had generally characterized Chinese media treatment of the US since November gave way to the virulent and abusive propaganda style of the Cultural Revolution.

The circumstances of this turn away from an emergent new Chinese policy suggests that both Mao and Chou may have been overruled by a coalition of the radicals and the elements in the military responsive to Lin Piao. Alternatively, Mao and Chou may have reasoned that given the strong opposition of the radicals and the military, a temporary retreat was in order. In any case, this dramatic reversal almost certainly reflected the growing strength of the Lin forces.\*

At the same time Washington raised an issue which hurt the moderates' case. In his press conference of 8 February, President Nixon not only reiterated US interest in SALT negotiations with the Soviets, he also justified his ABM program by saying it was directed against the "Chinese nuclear

\*For a detailed discussion of the question of the strength of the Lin forces, see below, p. 20, 24.



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threat." That the President had touched a raw nerve of China's status sensitivity was apparent from the fact that NCNA did not even mention Nixon's remarks on the ABM system and the Chinese nuclear threat in its story on the press conference. While this incident should not be exaggerated, it does appear that the press conference gave opponents of Chou and Mao additional ammunition in their campaign against the opening to the US. Certainly the ostensible reason given by the Chinese for cancelling the talks—the defection of a Chinese attaché in Europe in early February—is not a sufficient explanation for the turn around.\*

#### H. Bureaucratic Politics and the 2 March Clash

That Mao and Chou had been reversed on an initiative in which they had invested considerable prestige is only one of a number of indications that they may have been politically on the defensive at this time.

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25X1X4

[REDACTED] the many delays in convening the Ninth Party Congress were a direct result of Mao's calculation that he could not count on the support of the military at the meeting. Moreover, [REDACTED] the strength Lin Piao and his supporters ultimately achieved in the most vivid terms, and Lin was obviously making major strides toward this position of strength in early 1969. Mao himself, for example, has recently stated that "Lin Piao almost succeeded in taking over the whole party," and Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping has gone so far as to say that "the Lin Piao anti-party clique was able to expand its influence and gradually gain control of the Party."

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[REDACTED] If all this is coupled with the obvious advances made by Lin at the Party Congress at the expense of moderates and radicals, then one can make a case that both Mao and Chou were in a precarious, perhaps even desperate, political position in early 1969.

\*On this point Sutter, *op. cit.*, presents a convincing case against the importance of the defection.

It was in these circumstances, just 12 days after the planned Warsaw talks were cancelled and some 30 days before the opening of the Ninth Party Congress, that Chinese troops attacked Soviet soldiers near Chen-pao and touched off the most serious crisis in the history of relations between Communist China and the USSR. Since the Chinese Politburo was already debating the wisdom of a major shift in its foreign policy stance, this debate almost certainly influenced any decision regarding an attack on the Soviet Union. Those segments of the military that followed Lin Piao's lead probably were concerned about the initial steps taken toward the US and desirous of a more evenhanded policy which included an attempt at reconciliation with the USSR. It would thus seem highly improbable that most military men would have favored a deliberate provocation against the Soviets, especially at a time when military forces were still being used to restore internal order.

On the other hand, a clash with the Soviets would serve the interests of Mao and Chou in a number of areas. Most importantly, it would be a strong reassertion of Mao's personal authority following the 18 February setback and the general trend toward greater power for Lin and the military. Secondly, it would make it far more difficult for the military coalition to sustain a case that Sino-Soviet relations should be improved. Thirdly, the resultant increase in Sino-Soviet tension would provide dramatic justification for an opening to the US. And finally, it would serve the purpose of impeding the trend toward Soviet-US "collusion" by demonstrating the aggressive military nature of Soviet behavior. In short, it would serve both the foreign policy and domestic political purposes of these key Chinese decisionmakers.

This line of explanation, however, raises very difficult questions: if Lin and his supporters on the Politburo had been strong enough to reverse Mao and Chou on the question of the Warsaw talks, why would they not have had enough clout to prevent an action which was not in the best interests of the policy line they advocated? Moreover, since Lin was in charge of the defense bureaucracy, how could a decision requiring a military action be taken without his approval?

While it is possible that Mao and Chou confronted Lin directly on this decision and simply

ordered him to take steps to implement it, it seems more likely that, given their weak political position, they pursued their goals in a less direct manner by circumventing the normal chain of command and ordering Chen Hsi-lien, commander of the Shenyang Military Region, either to attack the Soviets or to alter patrolling procedures and get tough with the Soviets, thereby increasing substantially the chances of a clash.

But why would Chen Hsi-lien agree to a request from Mao or Chou which in effect would involve him directly in the internal power struggle in Peking? First of all, Chen's own personal ambitions were well served by an increase in tension on the Sino-Soviet border. There is a direct relationship between the relative military power exercised by China's regional military leaders and the potential influence they wield. As commander of the largest of China's military regions, except for Peking, Chen wielded considerable influence, but his position had been weakened by early 1969 because the re-

quirements of the Cultural Revolution had led to the transfer of two of Shenyang's eight armies to more heavily populated areas in China. The 1969 border crisis, however, led to the redeployment of these armies back to Chen's command and this, along with his role in the crisis, probably influenced his elevation to the Politburo at the Ninth Party Congress. Moreover, his subsequent career suggests that he has enjoyed the added trust and appreciation of Mao and Chou ever since the 1969 crisis. At a crucial juncture in 1974 when Mao and Chou's policies were again under fire, Chen was made commander of the critical Peking Military Region, and, in early 1975 Chen was elevated to the rank of Vice Premier at the National People's Congress which was dominated by the moderates.\* Thus, given the kind of political infighting that was under way in 1968 and 1969, it is plausible that Chen would have obeyed a direct order from Mao without consulting Lin Piao.

Other aspects of the events surrounding the 2 March incident support the view that the attack was not carefully planned by China's defense establishment, but, instead, was arranged on short notice, and executed without the knowledge of higher military authorities in the normal chain of command. Chen-Pao, for example, was an unusual site for a thoughtful military planner to select for a clash with the Soviets since no sizeable Chinese military installations or airfields existed nearby, and Soviet forces were highly concentrated in the area. In addition, no major preparations were made prior to the attack, and there were indications that Chinese military authorities in Peking were at least as surprised that the clash had occurred as were Soviet authorities.

This interpretation of the 2 March clash, in short, has Mao and Chou acting hastily and for highly political purposes rather than deliberately and solely with concern for what China's national interests required. That they were prepared to risk the death of hundreds of Chinese soldiers and conceivably even war with the Soviet Union is thus a measure not only of how high they calculated

\*It is also interesting to note that according to one source Chen was seriously considered as a replacement for Army Chief of Staff Huang Yung-sheng following the fall of Lin Piao.



Chen Hsi-lien

~~Top Secret Embargo~~

the stakes in the internal power struggle, but also of how badly they wanted to discredit those within China who opposed the opening to the US. Certainly the message that Mao could count on the loyalty of China's second most powerful military regional commander would not be lost on Lin in the continuing power struggle.

### I. Internal Politics and the Soviet Question

It is important to note that Soviet leaders were closely following events in China and that their interpretation of Chinese politics and foreign policy at this time was similar to the one presented above. Soviet diplomats in Peking observed at the time that the Congress had further isolated Chou and the "technocrats," and expressed the view that Chou had emerged from the Congress with a "diminution of real power." Brezhnev told East European leaders in the spring of 1969 that Moscow was in contact with a group of leaders in China friendly to the USSR and that this group was becoming stronger, and a number of articles in the Soviet press at this time referred to opposition to Mao among military leaders.\* More ominously, one Soviet official stated in April that Moscow was closely watching the development of "centrifugal tendencies in China," including provincial leaders who often found themselves at odds with the center. If the situation in China disintegrated further, he said, and "local elements" requested help from the USSR in its struggle with the "Maoist leadership," the Soviets might respond positively. Finally, Moscow ordered a substantial reduction in all propaganda attacks against Peking once the Ninth Party Congress opened, another indication that some Soviet leaders may have believed that a less hostile leadership might emerge from the internal struggle going on within China.\*\*

Given this perspective, it is not surprising that the Soviets tended to relate the 2 March clash to Chinese domestic politics. Soon after the incident, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin told American officials in Washington that the border clash was instigated with an eye toward the opening of the Ninth Party Congress. The 21 March issue of *New*

*Times*, stated flatly that the clash was an outgrowth of the "power struggle" within China. Though neither Dobrynin nor the *New Times* article offered any supporting detail, their interpretations at least raise the possibility that Moscow's views on the internal Chinese political situation were being shaped by information supplied by highly placed sources within the Chinese leadership.\*

### J. Aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the 2 March incident, many observers dismissed the clash as of little significance, yet another border skirmish which would quickly blow over. The Soviets also appeared initially to have wanted to avoid a major propaganda exchange. A border clash without some follow-up, however, would have served neither the domestic nor foreign policy goals of Mao and Chou. Indeed, it is interesting to note that if the goals had been focused primarily on territorial issues, then subsequent Soviet probes aimed at reopening the border talks would probably have been accepted more quickly. But instead of limiting themselves to sending a diplomatic protest note to Moscow, Mao and Chou implemented a massive anti-Soviet campaign.

Nationwide demonstrations began on the day after the clash. By 7 March some 260 million Chinese had participated in mass rallies denouncing Soviet revisionism and vowing vigilance along the border. In addition, angry demonstrations were staged outside the Soviet Embassy from 3 through 6 March and then resumed on 11 March, a tactic which drew a parallel response in Moscow on 11 March. Following the Soviet counterattack on 15 March, the anti-Soviet demonstrations resumed, and Chinese propaganda continued to attack Moscow shrilly. The message to the domestic rivals of Mao and Chou was unmistakable: anti-Soviet sentiment was strong among the Chinese people and anyone favoring lessened tension with Moscow was treading on very unpopular ground.

During the Ninth Party Congress, which opened on 1 April, Mao and Chou continued to exploit the

\*State, INR, *Intelligence Note*, "Has Moscow a Friend in Court in Peking?" 17 July 1969, SECRET/NFD.

\*\*By contrast, Moscow intensified their anti-Chinese propaganda during the Tenth Party Congress in 1973.

crisis with the Soviets, even going so far as to have one of the officers involved in the border clash appear before the assembled delegates. The key document presented at the Congress was the Political Report, and in the drafting and redrafting that preceded the formal presentation, Mao and Chou almost certainly used the implications of the crisis in their dispute with Lin over the foreign policy line to be taken.\* In this they were partially successful. The report formalized the view that the Soviet Union was as serious an enemy of China as the US, though, possibly in deference to Lin's demands, Moscow was not yet named China's principal enemy. Moreover, the denunciations of the US were relatively routine; the Vietnam war, a key cause of continued Sino-US tension, was not even mentioned.

Other sections of the report, however, reflect Lin's influence. In addition to insisting on language which left the door open for improved relations with the USSR, the leader of "world socialism,"\* the report asserted that Peking's foreign policy was "consistent" and that it was "not based on expediency," a probable slap at the moderates who wanted to take the expedient route of dealing with the US in the face of a Soviet threat. The debate over the contentious issues in the report continued to be a central issue in Chinese politics in the months following the Congress.

While there were ups and downs in Chinese propaganda throughout the remainder of 1969, tension in Sino-Soviet relations remained high, in large measure because until September the Chinese continued aggressive border patrolling and this resulted in additional armed clashes, and because Moscow responded by dropping veiled hints about a nuclear

\*For a more detailed discussion of this point, see above, pp. 18-19.

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Voting at the Ninth Party Congress are: Mao, Lin, Chou, Chen Po-ta, Kang Sheng, Chiang Ching, Chang Chun-chiao, Yao Wen-yuan.

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strike. By August and September a number of Western observers, including some intelligence analysts, had concluded that a Sino-Soviet war was inevitable in the near term. Whether or not the Chinese themselves expected war is not certain, but there is little doubt that they were alarmed and that the crisis atmosphere reinforced the position of the Chinese moderates who were disposed to be receptive to the overtures for improved Sino-US relations which were coming out of Washington.

In what was almost certainly a compromise between the moderates and their opponents, the Chinese agreed in October to open negotiations on the border dispute with Moscow, and then in January 1970 announced they would be willing to reschedule the aborted February 1969 Warsaw talks with the US. While it almost immediately became apparent that they were not taking the Sino-Soviet border talks seriously, they tried to keep up momentum in relations with the US by meeting in Warsaw in February 1970 and then scheduling another session of the bilateral talks for May 1970. Thus, the basic foreign policy goal of justifying steps toward an opening to the US was well served by the 2 March crisis; though, as discussed subsequently, Lin's drive toward expanding his power and influence in party affairs was not derailed but only slowed. He continued to oppose each move in the direction of Sino-US rapprochement. In this context, the Sino-Soviet clash of 1969 was a prelude to the decisive confrontation between the moderates and the military which began in 1969 and came to a crisis two years later—the fall of Lin Piao.

### III. WATERSHED: THE FALL OF LIN PIAO

#### OVERVIEW

*By almost all surface criteria, Lin Piao had won a stunning victory at the Ninth Party Congress, primarily at the expense of Chou En-lai, his principal rival. Chou's power base was in the governmental bureaucracies, and of the six men drawn from this sector on the Politburo in 1968, all but two, Chou and Li Hsien-nien, lost their positions at the Congress. Eleven military men were added to the Politburo, a majority of whom were apparently Lin supporters. Lin's close ally Chen Po-ta was named*

*to the crucial Standing Committee of the Politburo, and more importantly, the Congress formally adopted a new constitution designating Lin by name as Mao's successor. Lin, it appeared, was well on his way to supreme power within China. And yet, in just over two years after the Ninth Party Congress, Lin had fallen from power following an intense and ultimately violent struggle within the Chinese leadership.*

*Lin's fall was far more than the purging of a single individual. It was preceded by an elaborate conspiracy against Mao that involved a large number of individuals, and was followed by a massive purge of virtually all of China's ranking central military leaders. In the context of the framework presented in this paper, the Lin Piao affair represented the crisis stage of the struggle for power between the moderate coalition and the military that had been under way since the winding down of the Cultural Revolution in 1968. In relative terms, the radical coalition played only a marginal role.*

*Most previous explanations of the Lin Piao crisis have down-played the role of foreign policy issues. By contrast, this study presents the view that these issues, and more specifically what they implied in terms of resource allocation and the resultant balance of power between the moderate and military coalitions, are central to explaining the course of events that preceded Lin's abortive 1971 coup. In brief, Lin appears to have consistently opposed any steps toward rapprochement with the US throughout 1969 and 1970. He apparently seized on the US invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970 to argue for the cancellation of the scheduled Sino-US talks in Warsaw and to persuade Mao to make a series of reconciliatory gestures toward Moscow. This shift toward Lin's approach to foreign policy came to an abrupt end following the Second Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress in August 1970 when the balance of internal political forces began to tilt against Lin. Soon thereafter, there was a major change in China's propaganda line and by December 1970 Mao felt strong enough to extend the historic invitation to President Nixon.*

*Lin's continued opposition to the opening to the US is well documented, but what is more difficult*

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Lin Piao presenting the Political Report at the Ninth Party Congress

to explain is why he felt compelled to risk a confrontation with Mao on this issue. The answer apparently lies in the fact that concomitant with the critical debates over foreign policy issues in 1971, there was an intense struggle over the allocation of scarce resources, with Lin and his supporters favoring the continuation of the high levels of military expenditures they had obtained for 1969-1971. If Chou succeeded in enhancing China's sense of security by improved relations with Washington, they reasoned, a key element in their rationale for high military expenditures would be undercut. They may also have argued that Soviet-US progress in SALT posed a major danger to China's national security and that the US was, because of its "collusion" with the USSR, an untrustworthy counterbalance to Soviet power.

*These issues were so intimately linked that the old question of whether domestic or foreign policy considerations were paramount misses the more important point that in China there does not appear to be a wide division between the worlds of the foreign and domestic policymaker. In the words of Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua "foreign policies are inseparable from domestic policies" in China.*

#### A. Traditional Explanations

Most previous studies of Lin's fall have concluded that the "central issue" in the crisis was Mao's decision to reassert civilian control over a military establishment that had grown too powerful as a result of the Cultural Revolution, and the military's ultimately violent resistance to moves designed to implement this decision. By contrast, these studies

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dismiss the heated debates over foreign policy issues among China's leaders as "more tactical than causative or fundamental in nature," and suggest that Lin's favorable references to Moscow were made only "to score debating points."\* While the discussion that follows does not dispute the view that the Lin crisis was ultimately over whether "civilians" or Lin Piao and his military supporters would rule China, it does attempt to show that the debate over foreign policy was not a tactical side-show but rather a central and fundamental issue in the power struggle that preceded Lin's abortive coup.

### B. Foreign Policy Differences

As early as 1969, Lin had found himself at odds with Mao and Chou over whether or not to begin the process of improving relations with the US. After apparently derailing the first attempt to renew the Warsaw talks, Lin used every occasion possible to criticize Chou's line that improving relations with the US should be a priority objective of China's foreign policy. In the fall of 1969, he probably insisted that if the Warsaw talks were rescheduled for February 1970, Sino-Soviet border negotiations would also have to begin. And then in April 1970, the US and South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia gave Lin the leverage he needed to press for a major shift away from the opening to the US and toward some form of reconciliation with Moscow. Lin undoubtedly argued that this US action proved that a major premise of Chou's policy—that the US was withdrawing from Vietnam and therefore no longer constituted a threat to China—was erroneous. Using this argument, he apparently convinced Mao not only to cancel the scheduled May 1970 session of the Warsaw talks, but also to revert to the anti-US rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. In a statement

\*CIA, "Policy Issues in the Purge of Lin Piao," *Intelligence Report*, October 1972, SECRET/NFD/NDA/CD/

approved personally by Mao and issued on 20 May, the US was shrilly condemned, and President Nixon was assaulted as a perpetrator of "fascist atrocities." Significantly, within hours after it was issued, Lin personally read this statement to a massive rally in Peking organized by the PLA. Moreover, an authoritative joint editorial in June took a savage swipe at Chou and the moderate coalition by stating that the "principal criterion" for judging a loyal revolutionary was his attitude toward the US.

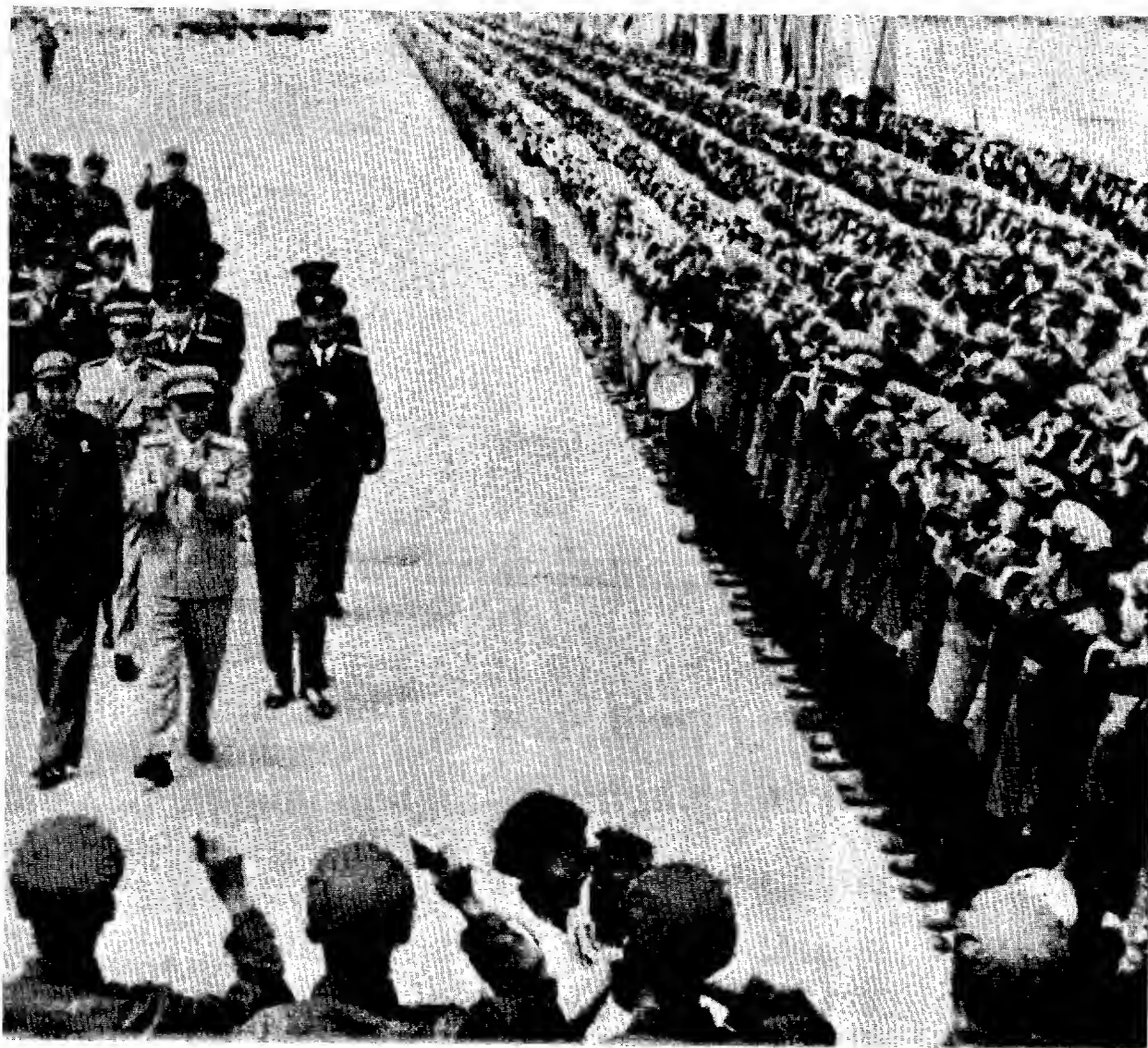
Lin was also apparently active in engineering a change in the direction of Chinese policy toward the USSR. The earliest indication came during Mao's and Lin's joint appearance at the May Day rally, an event which marked the first time the two leaders had appeared together in public in some six months. On this occasion, Mao went so far as to exchange comments with the chief Soviet negotiator to the border talks, an important symbolic gesture.

Just as significantly, there occurred at this time a marked and prolonged decrease in the volume and virulence of anti-Soviet propaganda. From 22 April until 6 September, Peking issued no authoritative direct attack on Moscow and there was a notable restraint in the few anti-Soviet stories that were printed. Most remarkably, there was virtually no commentary on the Brezhnev Doctrine on the 1970 anniversary of the August 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Indeed, the topic of the Brezhnev Doctrine which had received enormous media treatment in 1968 and 1969 was addressed authoritatively during this period only once—by Chou En-lai. While at first Moscow continued its propaganda attacks unabated, by early summer the Soviets had begun to restrain their own polemics. And on 15 August, the Soviets dispatched Deputy Foreign Minister Ilichev to Peking as their newly appointed chief negotiator in the border talks.

One of the clearest indications of tension between the moderates and the military was the marked schizophrenia evident in Peking's treatment of Army Day on 1 August. While Chou En-lai's statement just prior to Army Day stressed the dangers of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the joint editorials on 1 August pointed to the Soviet build-up on the



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Chief of Staff Huang Yung-sheng, left front, reviewing PLA troops

Sino-Soviet border, the major speech of the day by the PLA's Chief of Staff Huang Yung-sheng made almost no mention of the Soviet threat. Indeed, Huang concentrated his fire almost solely on the US and the danger it posed for China's national interests.\*

\*Huang, who was almost certainly acting on Lin's behalf, was purged following Lin's abortive coup in 1971. The most detailed studies of the purge are: "Missing Chinese Military Leaders," *Research Atd*, August 1972, SECRET/NFD; and "China's Regional and Provincial Leaders: The Purge of the Military, the Rise of Old Party Cadres," *Intelligence Report*, April 1973, SECRET/NFD.

Events began to move rapidly against Lin and his military supporters soon after Army Day. While Mao may have been susceptible to Lin's arguments in the period immediately following the Cambodian invasion, reasoning perhaps that a brief tactical shift toward the USSR would have an impact on US policy, he almost certainly was displeased to see how far Lin was carrying things. It was in these circumstances that the Second Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress convened—in August 1970.

At the Plenum, Lin and his supporters gambled that they were in a strong enough position to



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challenge Mao on the crucial issue of whether to retain the constitutional position of Chief of State.\* They not only lost this gamble but Lin's close associate, Chen Po-ta was purged and branded a Soviet agent, a clear indication of the extreme dangers of even appearing to adapt a "soft" line toward Moscow. In addition to these setbacks, Lin also apparently lost out in the debate over foreign policy. At any rate, the communique that was issued following the Plenum took a foreign policy line that differed markedly from the thrust of Chinese policy in the previous four months. While some restraint was evident in the communique, Moscow was authoritatively denounced for the first time since prior to the Cambodian incursion, and the moderates' policy of improving relations with the US and other "friends all over the world" was strongly endorsed.

The Plenum's communique was followed by an even harsher attack on Moscow in an authoritative *People's Daily* Commentator article on 13 September. The NCNA report accompanying the Commentator article emphasized this sensitive issue of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia comparing it to Hitler's invasion of Poland. Moscow responded in kind and the brief thaw in Soviet-Chinese relations was replaced by a period of harsh invective which lasted until January 1971 when a new period of relative calm set in, as a result of a Soviet effort to wind down the polemics.

Concomitant with the escalation of Sino-Soviet polemics, there were a number of major advances for the moderate coalition's program in other areas. In the three months following the Plenum, recognition agreements were concluded with four countries including Canada and Italy. State-to-state bilateral relations with Burma also improved, a key barometer of the influence of the moderates on policy. At the level of ideology, a major doctrinal departure was apparent in a November speech by Chou's close associate Chiao Kuan-hua. Chiao reformulated and expanded the concept of peaceful coexistence by stating that it applied to relations between "all countries whether they have the same

or different social systems." This contrasted sharply with the previous authoritative statement on the subject made by Lin Piao at the Ninth Party Congress. Lin at that time had made an important distinction between the principles to be applied to capitalist and socialist countries, stating that the former should be dealt with on the basis of peaceful coexistence while relations with the latter should follow the principle of "proletarian internationalism." Chiao's statement marked a clear and unambiguous shift away from an ideologically based foreign policy to one emphasizing state-to-state relations, and thereby constituted a major victory for the moderate coalition.

These developments set the stage for Mao's crucial interview with Edgar Snow in December 1970, during which Mao said that President Nixon "would be welcome" to visit Peking. While it can be argued that Mao had already lined up a consensus behind this initiative, there are also reasons to believe that Mao, perhaps in consultation with only Chou En-lai, decided to float the concept of a Nixon visit and then wait to see how strong the reaction would be within China's top leadership. He undoubtedly expected strong opposition, and may have decided on a bold move making China's invitation a *fait accompli* that would be difficult to reverse, even by a leader with the political clout of Lin Piao.

It is also important to note that Lin and his military supporters were faced by early 1971 not



Chairman Mao confers with Writer Edgar Snow, left

\*Mao had made clear that he wanted the title and position abolished; Lin, reasoning that this diminished his own prestige as Mao's heir apparent and would impair his own authority when he succeeded Mao, strongly resisted this change.

only with rapid progress in Sino-US relations, but also with a major change in the direction of China's policy toward Japan, a nation that virtually all Chinese military men looked upon as an historic enemy and as a potentially very powerful future enemy.\* As Chou En-lai later told a high level delegation to Peking, Lin Piao and his supporters had opposed the opening both to the US and Japan. Thus, moves toward improving relations with the Japanese were probably as hotly debated as the Sino-US issue.

As these events occurred, Lin realized that the tide was running against him. In February, he approved the drawing up of a contingency plan to seize power forcefully, a set of papers which were labeled the "571 Documents." While the foreign policy analysis in these documents is not extensive, it does reflect the views of Lin's group on the Sino-Soviet-US triangle. They attribute progress in Soviet-US relations, that is the drift toward detente, to China's needless perpetuation of the conflict with Moscow. Because "China and the Soviet Union have become rivals," the document states, "the latter sympathizes with the U.S." The obvious conclusion of this line of argument is that China would be better off if it decreased tension with the Soviet Union. In fact, one section of the documents advocates "secret talks, between China and the Soviet Union" aimed at "a temporary protective nuclear umbrella." Interestingly enough, the documents also list, without elaboration, "China-US talks" under the foreign negotiations section of the plan, an indication that the military coalition did not intend to break off communications with the US altogether.

Lin's opposition to the thrust of China's evolving foreign policy was not confined to behind the scenes plotting. According to an internal party document issued after Lin's abortive coup, "a prolonged policy debate" took place during the early months of 1971 during which Lin "violently opposed" extending an invitation to President Nixon to visit Peking. During this debate, Lin tried to browbeat proponents of the Nixon visit by saying that "he opposed it by virtue of the fact that he was Mao's successor and was the director of the People's

\*CIA, "China and Japan: Breaking the Logjam," *Intelligence Memorandum*, No. 0833/72, 14 February 1971.

Liberation Army." He reportedly insisted that it was improper to improve relations with capitalist countries before improving relations with the USSR.



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### C. Policy Issues and Power

At a critical point in any policy debate between leaders at the pinnacle of power, differences over issues become so intense that it is not the policy itself which is paramount, but rather the authority, power, and influence of the leader advocating the policy. And at this juncture the debate over policy is transformed into a struggle for who will hold the ultimate power to decide the issue. In 1973 no less an authority than Deputy Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua said that debates over foreign policy issues occur frequently, but that if one opposes a whole series of decisions, one becomes a prime candidate for being stripped of all power and purged from the party and government.\*

In this context, the key question is not whether Lin Piao opposed the opening to the US and Japan, but *why* he judged that this issue was important enough to run the ultimate risk of strongly and

\*Chiao, who became Foreign Minister in 1974, made his statement in response to the following direct question: "It appears that on a number of occasions in the last decade foreign policy issues have been a matter of serious debate and division. I realize that this is a sensitive question, but could you give us your views on this matter?"

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repeatedly opposing a policy that clearly had the approval of Chairman Mao himself.

Part of the answer to this question lies in the dynamics of the rivalry between Lin and Chou and their respective power bases. Very early in the protracted debate over policy toward the US and the USSR, Lin put his prestige on the line and probably argued that the US would remain deeply involved militarily in Asia and would therefore remain a principal enemy of China. Chou made a different estimate which eventually proved correct. Lin also probably argued that in the proper circumstances Moscow would be willing to make a significant move to decrease Sino-Soviet tension and that this option should be explored. Chou countered that Moscow would offer only unsatisfactory gestures; and in this, also, events proved him right. So in policy debate after policy debate, a certain dynamic propelled both Lin and Chou to attack the positions of the other in order to discredit the policymaker as well as the policy.

The roots of Lin's intransigent position, however, probably lie even deeper. He and his supporters were prepared to risk their careers because they realized that the power they had attained, as well as the even more exalted status they were seeking, were jeopardized by the *implications* of the policies advocated by their rivals in the moderate coalition. Decreased tension with the US and Japan and the increased sense of security that would grow out of improved relations with a nuclear power like the US, Lin and his supporters reasoned, would lead to pressures for smaller military expenditures, especially in the areas they believed to be critical—nuclear weapons, missiles, aircraft, and advanced military technology in general. And with a declining military budget, their influence and authority would also decline. Having fought his way to within a short distance of ultimate power in China, Lin saw the prospect of a reallocation of China's resources away from his power base in the military in general and the air force in particular as a direct assault on his personal authority. Thus, rather than see their power and authority drained away by the thrust of the moderate coalition's program, Lin and his supporters first opposed this program at every possible juncture, and, when this failed, attempted to seize power to reverse the unwelcome

transformation of China's domestic and foreign policy that was gaining momentum in 1971.

#### D. Resource Allocation

Evidence for the above interpretation may be found in three areas: [REDACTED] debate25X1X4 in the public media, and retrospective reconstructions of the history of military procurement in China. All of these are mutually reinforcing.

First of all it is important to note that discussion of the parameters of China's Fourth Five Year Plan (1971-1975) had begun in late 1970 and continued until after Lin's fall in late 1971. The debate over allocation of China's scarce resources under the Plan was almost certainly sharply contested. Thus, concomitant with the debates over foreign policy issues came an intense struggle over resource allocation, a struggle which inevitably became entangled with the specifics of the quarrel over foreign policy.

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[REDACTED]

This version of events is corroborated by another contemporary account [REDACTED]

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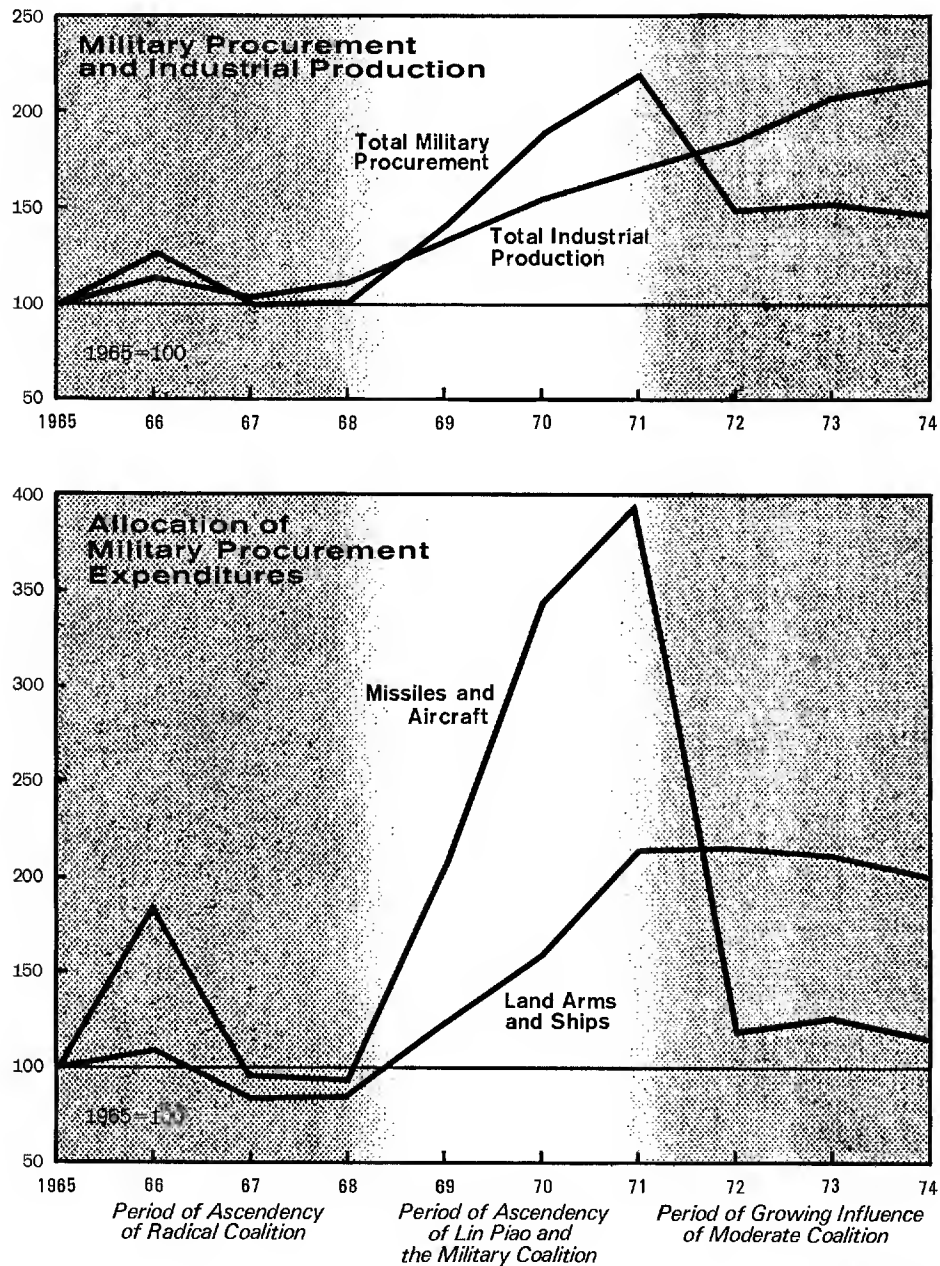
the political crisis in China revolved around the allocation of resources to the PLA, and in particular the share of the budget the air force was to receive. [REDACTED]

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Like many policy debates within China, this one found its way into the public media, though in slightly disguised form. Throughout the summer of 1971 numerous articles in *People's Daily* as well as some Radio Peking broadcasts focused attention on the problem of whether "electronics" or "steel and iron" should take priority in advancing the development of the national economy. A 13 June

## Resource Allocation and Military Procurement in China, 1965-74



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Figure 4. Resource Allocation and Military Procurement in China, 1965-74

article in *People's Daily* argued that one group of "political swindlers" within China (i.e., Lin and his group) saw "atomic technology and jet engine technology" (i.e., *electronics*) as the key to enhancing China's power and status in world affairs. A Radio Peking broadcast on 20 August was even more pointed. It charged that the same group of "swindlers" believed that advanced weapons were the "key to victory," and that once China possessed them, "all imperialists will be finished and overthrown." Significantly, these views were sharply contrasted with those of Mao who was quoted as condemning any strategy which was premised on the concept that "weapons decide everything."

Recent intelligence studies on military expenditures for procurement of new equipment also bear out this interpretation.\* Indeed, the rise and fall in the influence of the military coalition is starkly reflected in the statistics presented in these studies. During the period when Lin and the military were in an ascendant position, from roughly 1968 until the end of 1971, military spending on procurement in all fields increased dramatically, with a growing proportion going to aircraft and missiles combined, that is to what in 1971 was being called "electronics." Just as significant, however, are the extremely sharp cutbacks in this same area that followed Lin's fall from power in 1971. While the amounts expended for the procurement of land arms and naval forces have declined only slightly, expenditures on new aircraft and missiles have fallen dramatically. In overall terms, the reallocation of resources is shown by the fact that military procurement has decreased in relation to total industrial production (see charts on page 31).

It should be noted that this interpretation of Lin's fall from power does not argue that foreign policy issues were more important than the general

issue of civilian versus military rule. In effect, foreign policy issues were so intimately linked to a cluster of other issues that they formed an integral part of the overall struggle between the moderate coalition and the military coalition. A debate over resource allocation and foreign policy was the immediate catalyst because it brought to a head the entire question of the continued predominance of the military in Chinese politics and society. Mao and Chou were undoubtedly engaged in a broadly-based campaign to prevent Lin and the military from expanding their power still further, and to do so they not only confronted this issue specifically, but also used the thrust of their foreign policy program to focus the debate on the concrete issue of resource allocation.\* Just as in 1969 when they had used a foreign policy crisis to further their domestic goals, so in 1971 they used arguments drawn from the implications of their diplomatic program for the same purpose.

\*In this regard it is interesting to note that Mao himself has stated explicitly that one tactic he employs is to attack his opponents on the basis of issues rather than to confront them directly.



Chiao Kuan-hua

\*CIA, "Trends in Military Equipment Procurement in China, 1964-1973, in US Cost Terms," *Intelligence Report*, August 1974, SECRET; the general findings of this study have been declassified and published as "Allocation of Resources in the Soviet Union and China. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Priorities and Economy in Government of the Joint Economic Committee Congress of the United States Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session, Executive Session, April 12, 1974." Another study based on these statistics is "Military Developments in China: Implications for Defense Policy," *Intelligence Report*, March 1975, SECRET/NFD.

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All of this points to a general view that there is not as wide a division in China as in the US between the worlds of the foreign and domestic policymaker; indeed, it is reasonable to conclude that the small number of men at the apex of China's political structure do not make any significant distinctions between the spheres of domestic, foreign, and national security policy. Indeed, Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua has stated explicitly that in China "foreign policies are inseparable from domestic policies," and that no separate formal decision-making structure for foreign policy similar to the National Security Council exists in China.

#### E. Internal Politics and the Soviet Question

In the immediate aftermath of Lin's demise in September 1971, the leadership struggle between the moderates and the radicals apparently intensified. For about ten or twelve days between roughly 12 September and 25 September, the top leadership met in Peking to thrash out the measures that were to be taken in the wake of the crisis. During this period, the radicals may well have attempted to take advantage of the uncertain situa-

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Just as in 1969 when the leadership struggle intensified prior to the Ninth Party Congress, China's central leadership resorted to playing up the Soviet threat in the unsettled and fluid situation that followed Lin's abortive coup.

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Indeed, a crisis atmosphere was transmitted not only to party cadres but also to China's informed public. Summing up his impressions of what was going on, a resident of Canton stated that in September there was "a period of intense war alert during which hostilities with the Soviet Union were expected at any time."

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In reality, however, China's central leadership was far more concerned about possible Soviet manipulation of the internal conflict within China than any direct Soviet military action. Indeed, Chou told a visitor in early October that he did not fear immediate war with Moscow, but that he was concerned that the Soviets had been attempting to exploit differences within China over military priorities in the hope that pro-Soviet elements within the PLA and the Party might come to power. At the same time, briefings of senior Chinese officials strongly emphasized that they should maintain absolute secrecy concerning the Lin crisis lest Moscow learn the details.

Since 1971, Chinese leaders have continued to express their view that the Soviets not only have had lines of communication to certain elements within China, but also that the Soviets consistently try to exacerbate differences within China. In the

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#### IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US

##### A. The "Collusion" Theme as a Key Indicator

Since they began the transformation of China's domestic and foreign policies in 1968, backers of the moderate alternative have had to fight a two-front domestic war. On the one hand, they have been opposed by the radicals who were hostile to the moderate policy cluster for ideological reasons. On the other, they have been opposed by the



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military coalition not only because it was seeking supreme power in China, but also on grounds of "national security."

While the leverage of the radical coalition on policy decisions has now been considerably reduced, this apparently is not the case for the military coalition.\* This is for three reasons: many military leaders have their own independent power bases; they almost certainly have sympathizers within the moderate coalition in general and the foreign policy establishment in particular; they have a strong argument which is cast in terms of China's vital national security interests. Their argument probably would go something like this:

A basic premise of the moderates' national security program is that "contention" will always win out over "collusion" in Soviet-US relations, and that China can therefore count on a powerful US as a counterbalance to the USSR in world affairs. This premise, however, is extremely dangerous because it does not take into consideration two very real possibilities: 1) the first is that the US, because of domestic political and economic difficulties as well as international setbacks, may fall seriously behind Moscow in terms of the global balance of power and therefore be unable to adequately fill the role of a strategic counterbalance to Soviet power; 2) perhaps in part because of the above, the US may well find it convenient or even necessary to place such a great emphasis on improved relations with the Soviets, especially in the critical area of strategic arms limitation, that it will be willing to sacrifice its relations with China to attain this goal. Rather than rely on the US as a strategic counterbalance to the USSR, China must in the short term ameliorate tensions with Moscow to decrease the immediate threat of a nuclear war that China could not win, and, in the long term, place emphasis on building up a credible nuclear defense structure that could ensure China's security in the face of the USSR, the US, or Japan should it become a nuclear power. Thus, China is endangering its national security by placing too large a share of its national resources in the service of economic development rather than military expenditures, and the diplomatic rationale for following this course may well be incorrect because it fails to take into consideration the prospect that Soviet-US competition in world affairs could well be replaced by a degree of cooperation that would seriously endanger China's national security.

Seen in this perspective, events which signal significant or rapid progress in Soviet-US relations, especially in the area of strategic arms limitation,

\*CIA, "Chinese Debate Defense Spending, Related Issues," *Chinese Affairs*, 16 September 1974, SECRET/NFD.

are likely to lead to renewed debate within China over the wisdom of its present stance, and could lead to an increase of the relative power of the military coalition.\* Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the Nixon-Brezhnev summit of June 1973 and the signing of the Soviet-US agreement on the prevention of nuclear war, a "sharp and intense struggle" occurred within China over the implications of this event. For the first time since 1969, Chinese propaganda stressed the theme of "collusion" instead of the standard line, reiterated by Chou at the Tenth Party Congress, that "contention" would always predominate over collusion in Soviet-US relations.\*\* Significantly, a ranking member of the foreign ministry establishment appears to have written the analysis that touched off this struggle, and it is probable that he was supported by elements within the military establishment during the debate. Before it had run its course, the moderates once again resorted to a round of vitriolic anti-Soviet propaganda in public and dire private and public warnings of the prospect of an immediate Soviet threat. Indications that the military persisted in pushing for some adjustment in China's foreign policy stance continued until December, when an authoritative *Red Flag* article, most probably approved by Mao himself, criticized those who

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\*\*One such article accused Moscow of using the Soviet-US agreement on the prevention of nuclear war to proclaim the successes of its "peace diplomacy," while still carrying out "nuclear intimidation and blackmail against the people of various countries." NCNA also replayed a caustic article from a Japanese leftist journal entitled "The Illusion and Truth of the US-Soviet Summit—the Real Features of Soviet Social Imperialism." Brezhnev's goal in the summit talks, the article argued, was to "strengthen the hegemonic rule of the two superpowers"; the article also warned that world issues should not be settled by the "wisdom" of the superpowers. Similar themes were evident in a theoretical article in *Red Flag* which reflected extreme sensitivity to Brezhnev's boast that the political climate of the world is determined by the Soviet Union and the US. In one of the most defensive statements in the piece, the article asserts that the US and the USSR "certainly cannot determine the fate of the world" since the "people and the people alone are the motive force in the making of world history."

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wanted to make friends with China's close neighbors rather than ally with distant nations. And while it cannot be demonstrated conclusively, it seems likely that the massive reassignment of Military Regional Commanders that Mao ordered in December 1973 was partially motivated by continued opposition within the military establishment to Mao's "revolutionary line in foreign policy." Since this reshuffle, it has appeared at various times that Mao was preparing a massive purge of those elements in the military that were still resisting him and his policies, and there are some indications that he is presently displeased that this has not occurred.\*

The important point to note here, however, is that the military coalition remains an influential factor in Chinese politics, and that US policy and action toward the Soviet Union, especially on the issue of SALT, could have an important impact on the configuration of political power within China.

#### B. The Level of Tension

Overall, tension in Sino-Soviet relations has declined since 1969, in large measure because the moderate policy coalition has extended its control, the internal situation has become somewhat more stable, and China has received greater recognition from the international community. Nevertheless, tension could easily again flare up if during the protracted and delicate succession process already under way, a group within China were to become predominant which judges that its interests would be served by a provocation such as the 1969 border clash. Whether or not such a situation evolves depends in part on events outside China in general and on the actions of the USSR and the US in particular.

US moves which would enhance China's status, such as establishing full diplomatic relations, would probably strengthen the moderates' hold on power and their commitment to the policy of expanding ties with non-Communist countries. Paradoxically, such developments would probably also serve to

lessen the imperatives pressing elements in the Chinese leadership toward periodic crises with the USSR. Not only would the leadership have a decreased need to play up the Soviet threat to deflect attack from domestic critics, but—with more self-confidence regarding China's status in the international hierarchy—these leaders would probably be more willing to enter into serious negotiations with the Soviets over the border issue. If Moscow were careful to take Chinese sensitivities into consideration by making a substantial conciliatory gesture (such as a sizable drawdown of its forces in the border area), some form of mutually acceptable border arrangement could conceivably be worked out.

Even if some form of border arrangement were concluded, Sino-Soviet competition and contention would not cease. While the primary impact of a border arrangement would be to decrease substantially the chances of some future border incident escalating into a nuclear war, China's interests are at odds with the USSR's throughout Asia, and a border agreement would not end the struggle for influence and power there and in the rest of the world.

Moreover, even if there were some improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, the US would still have leverage for maintaining Sino-Soviet competition. The moderates, having been strengthened by normalization of the Sino-US relations, would probably allow the logic of their thesis on enhancing China's status to carry them even further in their pragmatic search for power and prestige through conventional diplomacy and economic development. Indeed, given the right circumstances, a moderate Chinese government might in the future be amenable to expanding substantially its cultural, economic, and even military ties with the West in general and the US in particular. Should the Sino-US relationship advance along these lines, there is little doubt that there would be serious Soviet concern, and that this would express itself in increased Sino-Soviet tension.

At the same time, expanded ties with the US would over time directly or indirectly provide greater resources for meeting the military coalition's

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goal of strengthening China's military capabilities. And an amelioration of internal antagonisms on this issue is likely to increase support for the moderates among at least some elements of the mili-

tary, a development which in turn would contribute to the strength and stability of a Chinese leadership coalition with vested interests in maintaining good relations with the US,

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